



Barbara J. Elliott

January 14, 1951 - March 8, 2026

Wife, mother, author, professor, social entrepreneur, Catholic evangelist, and faithful follower of Jesus Christ, Barbara J. Elliott illuminated the lives of thousands of people across the country and around the world. The author of five books and scores of articles, Barbara was an international television correspondent for PBS during the fall of the Berlin Wall. Upon returning to the states, she spent more than two decades investing in inner-city communities, not only founding organizations to meet the needs of the poor, the widowed, and the fatherless, but also personally building relationships with those in need of healing and hope.

Born in 1951 to Phyllis and Bill Scofield, Barbara attended Ohio Wesleyan University before working in politics, journalism, and academia. After serving as the director of Hillsdale College's Center for Constructive Alternatives and as editor of the *Imprimis*, Barbara moved to Washington, D.C. to work at the newly founded conservative think tank: The Heritage Foundation. In 1980 she was appointed by President Ronald Reagan to serve in The White House as Deputy Special Assistant in the Office of Public Liaison, where she directed programs on the White House economic program for leaders of the business community.

After leaving the White House, Barbara lived in Germany for 14 years, where she witnessed the collapse of Communism. When the wall crumbled, she

launched a private initiative in West Germany to care for refugees from Eastern Europe. As she heard the stories of courageous souls behind the Iron Curtain, she was intrigued by the bloodless nature of the Revolution and began traveling to formerly Communist countries. She interviewed Berlin border guards, priests, underground church leaders, politicians, and ordinary citizens whose faith sparked a movement that inched Eastern Europe towards freedom. These stories are memorialized in her book, *Candles Behind the Wall: Heroes of the Peaceful Revolution that Shattered Communism*.

After returning to the United States, Barbara launched three successful nonprofits in Houston. She served as the president of The Center for Cultural Renewal and founded the WorkFaith Connection, which has since helped tens of thousands of people transition from prison, drug addiction, homelessness, and unemployment into new jobs and new lives. For this she received the Social Entrepreneurship Award from the Manhattan Institute in 2011.

In 2001, Barbara received the Eleanor Roosevelt Award for Human Rights from President George W. Bush for her service to refugees fleeing communism in Eastern Europe and for serving America's poor.

After visiting many of the toughest neighborhoods in the country to interview leaders on the front lines of restoring purpose to the lives of individuals who have been trapped in a cycle of addiction, poverty, incarceration, and hopelessness, Barbara published *Street Saints: Renewing America's Cities*. It tells the stories of unsung heroes who are transforming their communities through the power of faith in action.

Barbara taught in the Honors College of Houston Christian University (2011-2025), where she led Socratic Great Books seminars and lectured on the intersection of faith, art, and culture. She earned an MA in Theology from the University of St. Thomas and was a Senior Fellow of the Dominican School of

Philosophy and Theology, where she received a Doctor of Humane Letters. Admired and beloved by her students, Barbara mentored hundreds of young people, walking with them through the joys and sorrows of life and sparking in them a desire to pursue the good, the true, and the beautiful.

A devoted wife to her beloved husband Winston, the couple met at a Liberty Fund seminar, in which Barbara waltzed up to Winston and said, “I agreed with everything you said,”—a high compliment for Barbara, and one that she later swore was not intended to be a pickup line. During their 29 years of marriage, Winston and Barbara never tired of reading great books together, discussing ideas, playfully sparring with one another, and inviting friends to join in good conversation, good food, and a good glass (or two) of wine. She was a loving mother to her four children and a doting grandmother to her 19 grandchildren, always remembering their birthdays and finding moments to get to know them.

Since becoming Catholic in 2001, Winston and Barbara have been faithful members of the Personal Ordinariate of the Chair of St. Peter at the Cathedral of Our Lady of Walsingham in Houston. Barbara’s faith was contagious, and she helped many people draw closer to God through her prayers, her gentle encouragement, and her own example.

Her own journey of faith began with an encounter during her time working for President Ronald Reagan when she had the chance to meet Mother Teresa. “The tiny nun, who barely came up to my shoulder, took my hand and pressed it into her rough and calloused one, saying: Love God, Barbara.”

“As I stood there among the purveyors of political power in the most powerful nation in the world, self-satisfied, puffed up with what we thought was our own importance (and I include myself among them), her presence inserted a

slender needle of doubt, deflating my own exalted notions of political prowess. It occurred to me, as I looked around that room in the Dirksen Senate Office Building, that one day in Mother Teresa's life brought more good to the face of the earth than all our efforts combined for a lifetime. The thought shook me to my core. And I can see now retrospectively that she lit a long fuse in me that would ignite the fire of faith in my soul six years later."

That spark shined every day for the rest of Barbara's life. She achieved three lifetimes worth of accolades, but her greatest achievement was love. She loved her neighbors, her students, her family, and most of all she loved Christ and His Blessed Mother—and she embraced the crosses He gave her, including chronic illnesses that brought much suffering in her final years.

When Barbara spoke at the White House Religious Liberty Commission last June—her final public engagement—she summed up the purpose of all our actions best: "Love makes all the difference. Love is the ingredient that transforms lives, lifts up the broken-hearted, restores hope, and heals all things. And love is something that no program can manufacture. It comes freely from the heart. Faith, hope, and love. Three manifestations of the virtues instilled by God. Faith is the root, hope is the stem, and love is the bloom."

As Spring makes her entrance, Barbara slipped from this world into the next, leaving behind her a radiant field of blooms. We miss her, we love her, and we remember her always.

Barbara is survived by her beloved husband W. Winston Elliott III, and their four children and 18 grandchildren: Stephanie and John Creech, and their children Mary, Benedict, Dominic, Paul, Annalise, Josephine, David, and Matthew; Tommy and Kyla von der Heydt, and their children Alexander, Charlotte, and Amelia; Winston IV and Marti Elliott and their children Addison,

William, Owen, and Jackson; and Elizabeth and Jonathan Clark and their children Nora, Katie, and Patrick. She is also survived by her brother John Smith and her sister Leslie Lovell. She joins in eternity her mother and father, Phyllis and Bill Scofield, and her granddaughter Savannah Clark.

Flowers may be ordered from the Cutting Garden (713.465.9145, <https://www.mycuttinggarden.com/>).

We would be very grateful for donations to the Community of Our Lady of Walsingham, a new religious community helping people live in the joy of Mary's yes (<https://maryshouseappeal.org/>).

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Previous Events

Rosary

MAR 21. 10:30 AM (CT)

The Cathedral of Our Lady of Walsingham
7809 Shadyvilla Lane
Houston, TX 77055

Funeral Mass

MAR 21. 11:00 AM (CT)

The Cathedral of Our Lady of Walsingham
7809 Shadyvilla Lane
Houston, TX 77055

Reception to Follow Service

MAR 21 (CT)

The Cathedral of Our Lady of Walsingham
7809 Shadyvilla Lane
Houston, TX 77055

Tribute Wall

AT

“ I was an honors college student of Dr Elliott's more than 10 years ago, and it's no exaggeration when I say she has played a huge part in shaping who I am as a Catholic and an artist. She deepened my understanding and appreciation for Catholicism and art in all its forms. I'll also never forget the incredible experience I had studying abroad at Oxford under her class. She'll be so missed and always fondly remembered.

Allison T - March 21 at 05:42 PM

ER

“ Edward Risher lit a candle in memory of Barbara J. Elliott



Edward Risher - March 20 at 04:39 PM

WO

“ Barbara,

Thank you for your courageous “yes.” Because you chose to follow God’s call, WorkFaith was born—and through it, thousands of lives have been restored with dignity, purpose, and hope.

Your love for people, especially those the world often overlooks, continues to shape the work we do every day. We are standing on the foundation you built, and we carry your heart forward in every life we serve.

Thank you for showing us what it looks like to lead with faith, to love deeply, and to trust God fully.

You are deeply loved, greatly missed, and your legacy will continue to bear fruit for generations.

We are lifting your family in prayer, asking for God’s peace, comfort, and strength to surround them in this time.

Your WorkFaith Family

WorkFaith - March 20 at 12:04 PM

RP

“ *I absolutely enjoyed every class discussion I had with her. Her very presence was grace, beauty, and wisdom. She was a dazzling gem and I hung on every word she spoke.*

I wish I could have known her longer and she will be deeply missed. Prayers of peace and solace to her husband, children, and friends.

Renée Peters - March 19 at 07:31 PM

LS

“ I only had the privilege of knowing Barbara through her daughter in recent years. We absolutely loved having her as our resident “wise woman” in our Well Read Mom book club. Reading her obituary helps me to realize what we already sensed - we were in the presence of someone very close to God. I will remember her warm smile and her humility in letting us “younger girls” give our two cents on topics that she could have run circles around us with! The last time I saw her at book club, we agreed that I needed to go on a long walk with her to pick her brain about loving children in all stages of life. I am sorry we didn’t get the chance on this side of Heaven, Barbara! Much love to the entire family and many prayers for the repose of her beautiful soul.

Leigh Schuelke - March 16 at 09:31 PM

KH

“ Barbara, you are dearly missed, and I consider it a privilege to have met you in Oxford with Winston ages ago. Grateful for the providential hand of God to have crossed our paths. May you rest in peace. Sending you and your family continued prayers Khalil habib

khalil habib - March 16 at 12:50 PM

MH

Years ago Barbara and Winston gifted our growing family with an old, but still very good, piano. That simple gift has resulted in hours and hours of wonderful music, laughter, and prayer in our home. My family and I are grateful for having known Barbara. And I’m a better person because of it. Requiescant in pace.

Marty Hayden - March 16 at 07:10 PM

AR

Barbara,

You will be dearly missed by your family and friends. I saw what a great influence she had with her students and the wonderful things you accomplished with The Center for Cultural Renewal.

Praying for Winston and family.

Aline Roach - March 20 at 11:22 PM